



## **MLW and Leadership Maryland: A Pathway to a Life of Leadership**

As president of her student government, 17-year old Kelly Robertson-Slagle was eager for an opportunity to grow and develop her leadership skills. When she was introduced to Maryland Leadership Workshops (MLW) in 1991, she knew that it was just the opportunity she was looking for.

“I had that leadership bug,” says Kelly, now the Director of Economic Development for Calvert County. “When I went through MLW, I was surrounded by other high school students that were just as excited and energized about leadership as I was. That was one of the really great aspects of the program for me.”

For Kelly, being surrounded by her peers—not only those participating in the program but also those leading it—was what made the experience something she’d continue to draw from throughout her academic and professional career.

“I believe that being peer led is what makes MLW successful,” says Kelly. “You’re surrounded by people like you, people of the same generation. Being led by staff that isn’t much older than you makes a huge difference. They talk about their experiences and what’s worked for them, and it’s incredibly relatable. That’s what drew me back to apply to be staff the following year—my personal experience. I saw how it worked for me and I thought, ‘wow, what a great example I could set for the next group of participants.’ It felt like a great opportunity to pay it forward.”

As a participant in the program, Kelly learned lessons that she continues to employ today in her work with the Calvert County government.

“As a staff member, I was given the opportunity to lead a class about conflict resolution, which had taught me the most impactful lessons when I went through it the previous year. Even as an instructor, I learned so much about myself, about leadership, and about my community. At the end, I knew I wasn’t finished learning.”

Kelly went on attend the College of Southern Maryland and the University of Maryland. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree in marketing, while still holding onto the passion for leadership she forged when she was young.

Eager to find new ways to hone her leadership skills, Kelly joined Leadership Southern Maryland’s Class of 2010 to learn more about what goes on within her region and, in 2018, applied for Leadership Maryland.

“I was grateful to have gone through Leadership Southern Maryland before pursuing the statewide program,” said Kelly. “It armed me with a deep understanding of my region—our healthcare, education, workforce development, economic development, housing—which made me a more effective and involved member of Leadership Maryland.”

While her previous leadership program experience prepared Kelly for the structure of the programming and deep, sometimes difficult conversations, Leadership Maryland still managed to surprise her.

“I didn’t expect it to be, but it’s been a stress reliever,” she said. “Being able to shut off my day-to-day, leave my desk, and truly immerse myself in whatever the topic is and wherever we are has been a blessing. The events themselves have been eye-opening beyond my expectations. Our trip to western Maryland, where we toured the detention center, was one of the most impactful days. Seeing how different real life inside of a jail is from what we see on television, learning the struggle of life after incarceration, and how high the rate of recidivism truly is has put a completely new perspective on that situation and that challenge within the criminal justice system in Maryland. I never would have seen that side of life without this program.”

Kelly started as an eager high school junior destined to be a leader and worked her way to a position in government where she is able to create real change within her community. Having gone through both MLW and Leadership Maryland, she sees true value in the partnership between the programs.

“Merging MLW with Leadership Maryland is just raising the bar,” said Kelly. “It’s so awesome and extremely valuable that now middle school and high school students know that if they want to truly stay connected with leadership, there’s a pathway that will lead them through a lifelong experience of constantly learning and developing their leadership capabilities. These programs are so unique and influential and having merged them together will only make the pathway to leadership that much clearer.”

To learn more about Maryland Leadership Workshops, visit [MLW.org](http://MLW.org). To learn more about Leadership Maryland, visit [LeadershipMD.org](http://LeadershipMD.org).